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Transnational Döner Kebab taking over the UK | Ibrahim Sirkeci^Y

Abstract

People move, finances move, so does the cultures, artefacts, goods and food. Remittances literature expanded significantly in the last two decades to cover more of what we refer to as social remittances. Social remittances refer to often intangible elements, cultural artefacts, habits, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, values transferred by migrants from destination countries to their home countries. Through studies on migrant remittances, we know that even in terms of financial transfers, remittances operate in corridors and in a two-way fashion. One third of remittances are sent to countries which are called “advanced economies”. United Kingdom, Germany, France are among the top remittance receiving countries as well as leading the table of sending countries. In this paper, I explore the ways in which social remittances change the foodscapes of destination countries with particular reference to Döner Kebab in the United Kingdom. Until two decades ago, Döner Kebab was a rare meal you would enjoy when holidaying in Turkey or if you happen to be in that cosy corner of North London. Nevertheless, in 2010s Britain, it became a popular fast food, particularly when it comes to what to eat after a night out. One may find an outlet selling Döner Kebab literally in every city, every town, every neighbourhood, every village in Britain. Multiple forces were in play in the making of Döner Kebab a British national food: 1) practicality of the food itself, 2) growing number of immigrants from Turkey arriving in Britain, 3) labour market disadvantages immigrants face, 4) asylum dispersal policies of the 1990s and 2000s, 5) declining incentives making small shops not viable economically, and 6) increasing number of British tourists visiting Turkey. In this article, a number of hypotheses are proposed for a conceptual model explaining the ways in which foreign food becomes part of the national food/cultural heritage in destination.

Keywords: *Döner; Kebab; Gyros; Transnational market entry; UK; fast food; place brand.*

Introduction

Irrespective of freedom of movement rules, people move, finances move, and the cultures move where we also witness food cultures are transferred and transformed across land and over time. Remittances literature expanded significantly in the last two decades to cover more of what we refer to as *social remittances*, a term coined by Peggy Levitt (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2013 and 2011). Social remittances refers to often intangible elements, cultural norms,

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habits, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, values transferred by migrants from destination countries to their home countries (Cohen and Sirkeci, 2012:21-22). Through studies on remittances, we know that even in terms of financial transfers, remittances operate in corridors and in a two-way fashion. One third of remittances are sent to countries which are called “advanced economies”. United Kingdom, Germany, France are among the top remittance receiving countries as well as leading the table of sending countries.

Another outcome of human mobility and increasing connectedness is the emergence of transnational consumers and transnational marketing practices (Sirkeci, 2013). Consumers when they change their place of residence or when they are involved in commuting, they often demand same products and services at their destinations, new homes. This is a driver for firms to enter new markets or expand their international operations. I have called it “Transnational market entry mode” which is mainly customer driven. This is similar to what Kumar and Steenkamp (2013) call diaspora route, which is proposed as an entry strategy. Like firms and brands, products and tastes enter new markets with migrants and diasporas. Depending on the qualities of the products (or food in our case), then food such as “Döner Kebab” may gain substantial market share and over time can become part of the identity of the place, or in other words, can be part of the place brand (e.g. brand of a city, or a nation).

In this conceptual paper, I try to bring together these concepts of “reverse social remittances” (i.e. migrants and visitors bringing in different tastes from countries of origin) and transnational market entry (e.g. new food entering and conquering a new market to become part of the mainstream and part of the place branding). I explore the ways in which social remittances change the foodscapes of destination countries with particular reference to Döner Kebab in the United Kingdom. New food items can overtake share from earlier immigrant foodscape as in the contest between Polish and Irish food in the UK (Coakley, 2012) and change it substantially as in the case of Italian food taking over New York foodscape in the early 1900s (Cinotto, 2009).

Oxford Dictionary defines Döner Kebab as a “Turkish dish consisting of spiced lamb cooked on a spit and served in slices, typically with pitta bread” and the term comes “from Turkish words döner 'rotating' and kebab 'roast meat'”. This is obviously the British version of it. Back in Turkey, it is served with rice and salad or chips, or in a wrap. This is the twist, döner kebab has taken through the journey and likely that first happened in Germany, where a large Turkish diaspora community have existed since the 1960s (Sirkeci, 2006). In Germany, Döner Kebab has now a very well established place on the menu of main take away foods along with pizza, burgers, and French fries (Richter et al., 2012). Mushaben (2006) argued “As the ubiquitous presence of pizza, döner kebab and Asian noodle stands throughout Germany prove, foreign guestworkers have redefined the culinary tastes of average citizens since the 1960s.”

Until two decades ago, Döner Kebab was an exquisite meal you would enjoy when holidaying in Turkey or if you happen to be in that cosy corner of North London. Nevertheless, in 2010s Britain, it became a leading fast food, particularly when it comes to what to eat after a night out. One may find an outlet selling döner kebab literally in every city, every town, every neighbourhood, and every village in Britain. “The 'kebab' is one of the fastest growing sectors in the fast food market in some parts of Europe, including in the UK” (Mintel, 2002 cited in Meldrum et al., 2009). As one of the fastest growing fast food in Europe, Döner Kebab has apparently become the favourite dish for nearly 30 percent of Italians under 35 (Panozzo et al., 2015). In 2012, James Angelos (2012) wrote that “There's Nothing More German than a Big, Fat Juicy Döner Kebab” referring to growing appetite for the food. Perhaps it is about time to ask a similar question: What is more British than a big fat juicy doner kebab?

In this paper, the focus is on the UK market only although the widespread availability and success of this particular food across Europe are known. Döner's market entry and drivers behind, though, are very similar across the transnational geography of fast food. Multiple forces were in play in the making of Döner Kebab¹ a British national food: 1) practicality of the food itself, 2) growing number of immigrants from Turkey arriving in Britain, 3) labour market disadvantages immigrants face, 4) asylum dispersal policies of the 1990s and 2000s, 5) declining incentives making small shops not viable economically, and 6) increasing number of British tourists visiting Turkey. Based on these intervening factors identified and the trajectory of kebab businesses development in the UK, a series of hypotheses are formulated to be tested in developing a conceptual model for explaining the ways in which foreign food becomes part of the national food/cultural heritage in destination.

Data sources

To establish the trends in the expansion of “doner kebab” businesses in the UK, we have compiled a database of businesses with “kebab” or “doner” in their registered names on the Companies House UK (<https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/>). This search generated a list of 2121 businesses after some records eliminated as they were not food businesses. The records allow us to identify the name of the businesses, date of incorporation, full postal address of the registered business. The list of businesses with “kebab” or “doner” in the name is used in this study as a proxy indicator of the development in this line of business. Otherwise, there are many other businesses with authentic brand names vending doner kebabs around the UK. For example, Mr Ibrahim Doğuş, manager of the British Kebab Awards, claims there are 20,000 Kebab businesses in the UK (British Kebab, 2015:4). Hence

¹ “Döner Kebab” is used in this article to refer to a variety of Turkish Kebabs consumed for simplicity reason. These include a range of shish kebab (kebab on skewer).

this is just a subsample of all kebab businesses in the country as there are many registered with other names. The population data used in this study to map the growth of Turkish diaspora in the UK is retrieved from the UK Censuses 1991, 2001 and 2011.

What is a döner kebab?

It was argued that “*a particularly illustrative example of culinary hybridization is Caglar's (1998) study on döner kebab. ... Döner kebab was marketed as an authentic Turkish product, even though it was virtually unknown in Turkey*” (Frank & Stollberg, 2004). Although it is not so common in daily routine appetite of back in Turkey, as Turkish (and Kurdish) people wandered around and settled in sizeable diaspora communities in Western Europe and beyond, Döner Kebab went through an evolution across space and cultures (Panozzo et al, 2015). Despite the common name and standard way of upright grilling of this particular kebab, taste and ingredients may slightly differ from country to country. For example, lamb is common in the UK whereas in Germany and continental Europe beef is dominant. However, it can be lamb, mutton, beef, goat, chicken or turkey.

Döner Kebab is prepared by stacking marinated slices of lean meat and minced meat on a vertical spit and often distributed in frozen cylindrical shape from hundreds of small and big Döner factories around Europe. Some restaurants and shops often in metropolitan centres do in house production themselves. This cylindrical shaped meat, then cooked in a vertical rotating grill by “radiant infrared heat emanated from hot plates or gas-powered burners (reaching a temperature between 200 and 300°C) starts when the shop opens and goes on until the meat is cut for consumption. At this point thin slices of cooked meat are cut and put in a pocket of pita bread (...) often accompanied by a choice of sauces (mayonnaise, ketchup, tzatziki, chilli, harissa and vegetables (Heinz and Hautzinger, 2007 cited in Panozzo, 2015)².

We should also mention that the invention of Döner Kebab is attributed to Turks but the food itself is very similar to Gyros (of Greeks) and Shawarma (of Arabs) as “the food cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean are closely interlinked (Kremezi and Helou, 2010: 198) also see Al Afandi and Edlbi, 2015). Using slightly different sauces and methods, these are all meat grilled on a vertical spin (roisserie) and served with various yogurt and garlicky sauces often in a wrap (although varieties presented in plate exist too). Arabic word for Döner Kebab, “Shawarma” is apparently originating from Turkish word “çevirme” which means “to rotate” or “to roast on a spit” (Kremezi and Helou, 2010:203-204). Greek word for Döner is Gyros which means “turning” or “rotating” and apparently this was only came into use late to disassociate from Turkish.

² For a very detailed account of Döner, Gyros, and Shawarma and apparatuses used, please see the US patent application: Al Afandi and Edlbi (2015).

Unlike Turkish döner kebabs which are made mostly with lamb and chicken, Gyros is made with pork. However, this probably one of the most common fast food offerings worldwide can be made with different types of meat including veal, beef or turkey. Turkish Döner Kebab is typically made with lamb or chicken as slices of meat are marinated and stacked over a vertical roasting spindle. In industrial types, minced meat is used and doner cones are usually frozen and shipped. Döner cone once ready are put vertically next to a grill for roasting. Slowly turning spindle ensure the meat is slowly and evenly cooked. Although new electric devices are in use, traditionally, the roasted meat is sliced by a long knife. Then the shaved slices of roasted doner kebab are served either in a wrap (i.e. pita bread in the UK) or on lavash (a thin bread in Turkey) or on a plate with rice or French fries accompanied by some salad. Pickles and different sauces can also be added particularly in fast food format. It is argued that large fast food chains shy away from Döner because of the special skills required to prepare and serve doner kebab as well as time required for slow cooking of the meat (Al Afandi and Edlbi, 2015).

Döner kebab and Turkish diaspora

The word kebab and vertical or horizontal rotating skewer kebabs are common in many Middle Eastern countries. Invention of Döner Kebab goes back to mid-1800s (Tan, 1990). However, it is pretty much clear, despite some contesting claims, Döner Kebab was properly introduced to Germany, and hence to many other countries in Europe, by Turkish “guestworkers” in the mid-1960s, although it was first served about a decade earlier at a German restaurant in Potsdam.³ This restaurateur in Potsdam was inspired by his trip to Turkey and decided to serve the food in his restaurant upon his return in 1954.

Over the decades since the 1960s, large Turkish and Kurdish diaspora populations emerged in Western Europe, particularly in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Austria, Belgium, the UK, Sweden and Denmark (Sirkeci, 2005). These movers arrived in Europe as a result of bilateral agreements and were motivated by lack of opportunities, discomforts, tensions and conflicts back in Turkey (Sirkeci, 2006; Sirkeci and Cohen, 2016). Today, possibly there are over 5 million Turks, Kurds and other groups from Turkey live in Europe and another million is estimated to live elsewhere (Sirkeci et al., 2016a and 2016b). The movement of Turkish citizens were marked by different stories as they moved across space and time. While they were mostly contracted guest workers in the 1960s, these turned to family migrants in the 1970s, and then evolved into refugee flows in the early 1980s before the arrival of tens of thousands of Kurdish asylum seekers until the 1990s and early 2000s, when the flows were characterised by high level of irregular movers (Sirkeci et al.,

³ See the German version of Turkish daily Sabah’s news about who sold the first Döner Kebab in Germany: <http://www.sabah.de/ilk-doneri-kim-satti> (Retrieved: 17/08/2016); Also see the claim about first served Döner Kebab in Kloster Keller restaurant in Potsdam: <http://www.turkdoner.com/index.php?tekh=2060> (Retrieved: 17/08/2016).

2016a:2-3). These changes in flows and motivations have likely had an impact on the journey of Döner Kebab from high plateaus of Anatolia to Western Europe and beyond.

There are far many more destinations for Turkish citizens to wander and settle and Döner Kebab is one line of business many took a chance in these new lands. It must be very difficult to find a country with no Döner Kebab shop or restaurant. I, for one frequent traveller, have seen Turkish Döner Kebab restaurants and kiosks all over Europe, from Portugal to Romania, and beyond, from Korea to Mexico, from Malaysia to Mongolia. The reasons behind are complex and multiple but perhaps one can mention a few: (a) the difficulties (including discrimination) faced by newly arrived movers in entering mainstream labour markets and business markets in destination countries, (b) authenticity of Turkish döner kebab and acceptability of such offering to local consumers, (c) relative ease in entering this niche market, (d) increasing familiarity about döner kebab among consumers in many countries, (e) availability of the product almost everywhere.

Turkish migration to the UK followed a different trajectory than movements to continental Europe. The early comers were Turkish Cypriots fleeing the conflicts in the eastern Mediterranean island from the 1950s onward. Mainland Turks (including the Kurds) have arrived mostly after the 1970s and their numbers doubled in every 10 years after 1980. In the 1990s and 2000s, Kurdish asylum seekers have dominated the inflows. Today, despite many controversial accounts and unsubstantiated claims putting the number of Kurds and Turks around 500,000 or above, the total size of this particular population should be somewhere around 250,000 including Turks, Kurds and Turkish Cypriots based on the 2011 UK census (Sirkeci et al., 2016b; Sirkeci and Esipova, 2013: 6). According to Sirkeci et al. (2016c), majority of 41,224 asylum applications should be by Kurds given the continuing ethnic conflict in Turkey. While Turks from mainland Turkey and Cyprus are concentrated in London and the South East (about 80%), about 60% of Kurds are rather dispersed around the UK. This difference in spatial distribution of ethnic groups from Turkey is due to the asylum seeker dispersal policy in the UK was introduced by the *Immigration and Asylum Act 1999*. Unsurprisingly, this policy affected the Kurds who have mostly arrived as asylum seekers⁴.

In the 2000s, the UK saw the implementations of the above mentioned asylum dispersal policy. Hence the Turkish and Kurdish movers were dispersed around the UK. At least 41,224 Turkish citizens applied for asylum in the UK between 1980 and 2016 (Sirkeci et al., 2016b; Sirkeci and Esipova, 2013:6). Mostly Kurdish, these asylum seekers have arrived in remote places in Wales, Northern England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Apart from the paperwork, one other thing they carried along was the inspiration to start a Döner Kebab

⁴ According to the UNHCR, there were 18,090 asylum applications by Turkish citizens in the UK during the 2000s only (Sirkeci et al., 2016b).

business, often out of absence of any other options. Therefore, many pioneers of Döner Kebab's conquest of British Isles were those Kurdish asylum seekers both as entrepreneurs and inexpensive labourers propelling otherwise economically unviable small businesses.⁵ Despite Turkish diaspora is largely located in London and South East (Sirkeci et al., 2016b), kebab businesses are spread all over the country.

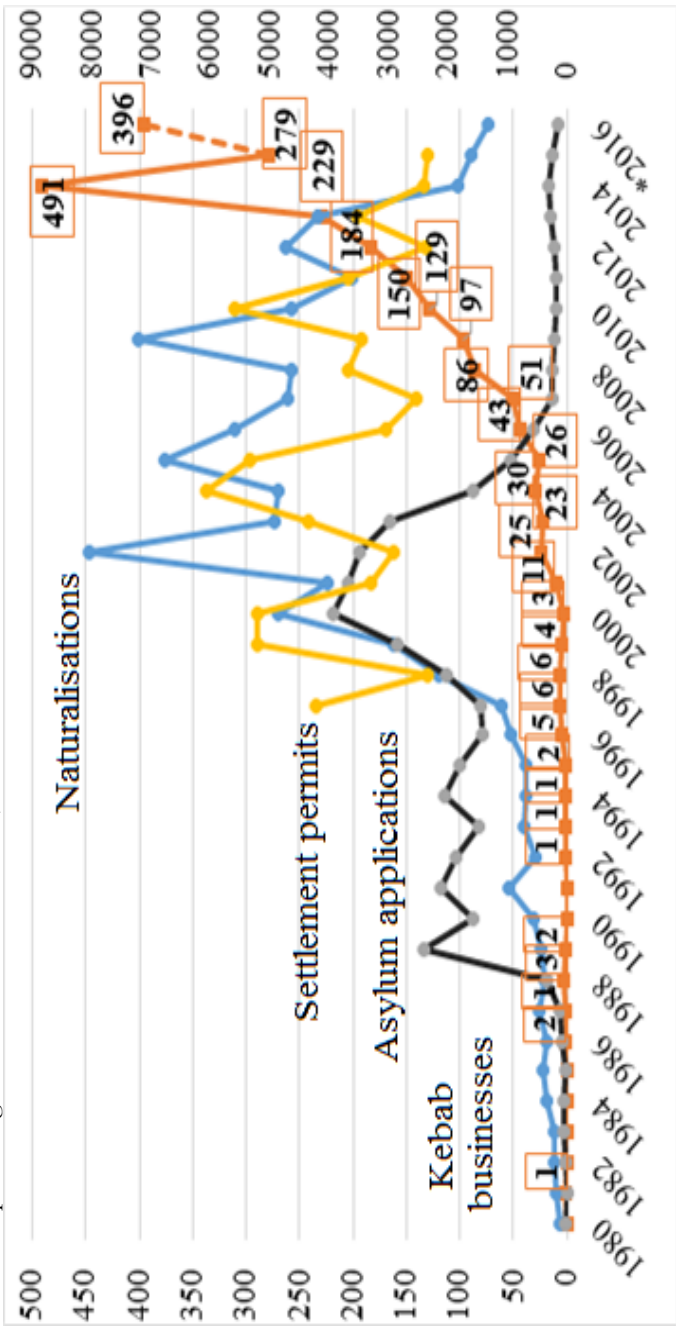
Hence six decades or so after the arrival of first Turkish guestworkers in Germany, the headlines were "UK's first German Döner Kebab to open in Birmingham" (Beardsworth, 2015) which clearly indicates a saturated market where diversification is needed. Nevertheless, in the UK, the first Döner Kebab was allegedly served by Hodja Nasreddin Kebab House opened in 1966 in Stoke Newington, North London and owned by Çetin Bükey (Akkoç, 2015). Especially in the 2000s, a rapid growth in Döner Kebab businesses was witnessed.

During the 1980s and most of the 1990s, there were a few business registrations with Companies House UK, but with the 2000s, numbers sharply increased. In the 2010s, we have seen an exponential growth in the number of businesses with "Kebab" in the name (Figure 1). This should be linked to (a) the growth of Turkish diaspora population in the UK, (b) growth of holidays and visits to Turkey by British and to Britain by Turks, and partly as a result of the growing number of movers and trips, (c) increasing acceptance of Döner Kebab in the UK.

Figure 1 shows the development of Turkish and Kurdish diaspora in the UK from 1980 onwards. Overall, there seems a parallel between the growth of the diaspora population and the number of kebab businesses. The critical size, of potential entrepreneurs, has been reached by the early 2000s, when significant increases in businesses were seen. Given the lengthy asylum application decision processes and legal requirements for establishing businesses in the UK, beginning of the 2000s was when significant number of Turkish citizens were granted indefinite (or long term) residence and British citizenship. The outlier in the figure is the extraordinary peak in 2014. There is no known reason for such a peak in that particular year. However, possible increases in redundancies during the economic crisis may have forced some to turn to self-employment. Nevertheless, the growth pattern towards the end of the time series indicate a sharp increase which, I believe, might be something to do with increasing popularity of the "Kebab" and thus entry of, not only Turks and Kurds but more players (i.e. entrepreneurs) of other ethnic origins into the market.

⁵ Light and Bonacich (1991) underline ethnic self-employment and widespread in-group exploitation, high failure rates, low profits and vulnerability among the Koreans in Los Angeles. Similar notes were made regarding Turkish and Kurdish businesses in London (Kesici, 2015; Dedeoglu, 2014; Sirkeci et al., 2016b).

Figure 1. Growth of Kebab businesses in the UK and the number of asylum applications by, naturalisations and settlement permits granted to Turkish citizens, 1981-2016



Source: Companies House UK; Office of National Statistics; Sirkeci & Espinova, 2013.

* Projected number of Kebab businesses based on the data for the first 7 months in 2016; asylum and naturalisation data is only for the first six months of 2016. Settlement permits data not available for 2016.

Ethnic minorities and foreign born are known to have higher self-employment rates compared to native born in the UK and OECD countries in general (Rath and Swagerman, 2011:28). These high self-employment rates are also an outcome of socio-economic discrimination and disadvantages faced by immigrant communities (Pecoud, 2002:495), as well as the presence of such market -i.e. business- opportunities (Jones et al., 2000 cited in Pecoud, 2002:495). In Germany, where the largest Turkish origin immigrant population is present, there were over 50,000 businesses already by the end of 1990s which was argued to be due to the difficulties faced by immigrants in the labour market such as high unemployment (Pecoud, 2002: 496).

The other side of the coin is growing tourism between the country of origin and destination. British citizens represent the third largest group of visitors (well over 2 million per year or about 7 % of the total since 2008) in Turkey (www.turizm.gov.tr). The number of British visitors to Turkey were 716,000 in 1996 and 1.3 million in 2006. In the same period, the number of Turkish visitors to the UK went from about 140,000 to 220,000 (Sirkeci et al. 2016b). The implication of this growth in visits is the increasing familiarity with the food consumed in the country visited and the likelihood of consumers demanding same food back at home. Or in our case, consuming it upon return home as the food -i.e. doner kebab- is already available in the UK.

Regarding increasing awareness and acceptance, it is possible to claim that by the late-2000s, Döner Kebab had already been a concern for health in the UK. It was considered to be a healthier choice of takeaway by Simon Langley-Evans, a professor of human nutrition at Nottingham University since “as a meal it brings together lean meat, wholemeal pitta bread, and it brings in vegetables in the form of salad. But doner kebabs tend to come smothered in dressings, which bring in a lot of fat and salt” (BBC News, 2009). Food Standards Agency in the UK was already warned about döner kebabs which was recognised as “growth area in fast food sector” by 2004 (ACMSF, 2004: 18) and soon “they found that 18.5% of doner takeaways posed a "significant" threat to public health, and 0.8% posed an "imminent" threat in 2006 BBC News, 2009). These reports are also signals of the fact that Döner Kebab is becoming somehow accepted in the destination country. This is when the ethnic enclave fades away and döner businesses begin joining the mainstream.

What makes Döner a British Kebab?

I noticed a big outdoor signs reading “Döner from Germany” at a visit to Czech Republic’s capital a few years ago. Now the “German Doner Kebab” brand storms the UK fast food market as they are about to open their 12th shop in 2016 as part of their ambitious global expansion. German Doner Kebab has franchise outlets in over 12 countries from Russia to Nigeria (GDK website: <http://www.donerkebab.net/>). Setting a brand name, combination of nationality, country of origin and the food in this case, is a delicate task. Seeing “Döner from Germany” in Czech Republic sounds reasonable given the high

quality reputation attributed to anything from Germany perhaps sounds better than giving it the original root country and call it “Turkish Doner”. It supports the argument that “consumers often lack expertise in judging food quality... brand names can therefore serve as a reliable signal of quality” (Tellstrom et al., 2006:131). In this case, a country of origin, Germany is used as a brand to ensure consumers of the food quality.

In the UK, seemingly Döner Kebab has now been recognised as part of the national food culture. Endorsing the 4th British Kebab Awards ceremony, former Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron said: “The kebab industry has made a very significant contribution towards the UK economy and shows entrepreneurial aptitude through each and every successful small business venture. Kebabs have become part of our food heritage, alongside fish and chips and curry” (British Kebab, 2015).

Ibrahim Doğuş, who founded *British Kebab Awards* in 2011, claims there are 200,000 jobs created by Kebab businesses selling 1.3 million kebabs every day and generating £2.2 billion per annum (British Kebab, 2015:4). These numbers were also celebrated by other high profile



endorsers including the then opposition leader, Ed Miliband of Labour Party, who said “Kebabs have now established themselves as a firm favourite in British households” whereas Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrat Party referring to Kebabs as “firm British favourites” and Boris Johnson, then Mayor of London praising the award ceremony as “appropriate recognition of the cultural and economic contribution of the humble kebab to the British economy” (British Kebab, 2015:6-7). Acknowledging the achievements of British Kebab businesses, hence indirectly that of Turkish-Kurdish achievements is part of general recognition of their position in the UK, similar to what Pecoud (2002:501) claimed for the Turks in Germany.

These are also in line with the argument that “food with an emphasised association with a place is a ground for individual’s identity and is central to the heritage of an area” (Tellstrom et al., 2006: 131).

The hypotheses developed based on the preliminary analysis of the growth of Doner Kebab in the UK are listed below. Some of the factors such as presence of substitutes has an adverse effect on the process of food becoming part of local heritage in destination country. Intensity of links, ties with the country of origin through travel, tourism, trade and governmental affairs can positively affect the process of a foreign food adopted in the destination country. Some cultural traits and values can foster or inhibit the process. For example high openness to change (with reference to Schwartz (2012) value dimensions) score in the UK means relatively easy entry in the market. One

other important factor is availability of supplies and necessary human resources. This is helped by transnational market entry (or diaspora market entry) of original recipe supplies from countries of origin as well as presence of a large pool of ethnic workers with required skills in producing the food products and services. The level of supply and demand would determine the price of foreign food and in return it would affect the appeal of the food to local, native consumers. To become part of the mainstream national food heritage, price has to be reasonably low. As mentioned above, certain opinion leaders' endorsement of the food is of critical importance to the success of a foreign food becoming part of the national food heritage. Politicians and celebrities who are preferably not controversial may facilitate the process. Word of mouth is always an important factor as the number of customers who experienced the foreign food increases, more will join that pool.

Table 1. 13 Rules of Foreign Food Becoming National Heritage

-	Presence of substitutes
-	Intensity of the links with the country of origin
-	Openness to change in the market
-	Presence of interested entrepreneurs
-	Quality of the food
-	Adaptability of the food to local taste
-	Availability of supplies
-	Availability of skills to prepare and serve
-	Practicality of serving fast
-	Price
-	Positive endorsements (politicians, celebrities)
-	Presence of customers who experienced the food
-	Good luck

A conceptual model based on the development of doner kebab in British market should take into account these factors: supplies, substitutes, adaptability, price, public awareness and support, conducive (welcoming) value environment, transnational consumers and transnational links (incorporating diaspora communities), quality attributes of the food product and possibility of satisfying human resource needs in the new market. This may seem a long list, however, many of these qualifiers are interrelated and can relatively easily be available. For example, strong transnational mobile consumer presence in a given market more or less means exiting diaspora populations, relevant human resource pools, awareness as well as a degree of openness to change. Thus businesspersons who are interested in such products and markets would not be terrified with a tumultuous task of ensuring each and every one of these conditions separately. Nevertheless, one should also consider potential adverse

factors. For example, rising anti-immigration sentiments and nationalism may hinder chances of foreign products entering such markets. Similarly, anti-EU campaigns during the 2016 EU referendum in the UK might have adversely affected local kebab businesses as the public opinion, at least for a while, turned hostile to foreigners and about almost everything relates to foreigners and particularly those from Europe.

Conclusion

When people move one place to another, they do so with their money, possessions, goods, as well as foods and cultures. Remittances literature expanded significantly in the last two decades to cover more of what we refer to as social remittances. Social remittances refer to intangible elements, cultural artefacts, habits, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, norms, values transferred by movers from destination countries to their home countries. Nevertheless, there are equally large flows of remittances towards the countries of destination. It is a two way process and there is no reason to assume, social remittances are not transferred from countries of origin to destinations either. Doner Kebab, like many other “new food” in the United Kingdom, Germany, France and many other major destination countries is part of these social remittance flows in parallel to people flows from sending countries. In this paper, I discussed the ways in which Doner Kebab, as an example of social remittances changed the foodscape of the United Kingdom during the last two decades.

In the 2010s, doner kebab gradually became a popular fast food in Britain, particularly when it comes to what to eat after a night out with tens of thousands of take away outlets, restaurants and delivery business across the country. There were many factors helped this process including migration and asylum policies in the UK. International human mobility has profound impact of changing foodscapes around the world and doner kebab in the UK is case for such a change. Growing number of immigrants from particular country of origin helped increasing popularity of doner kebab which was also supported by a parallel process of growing transnational entry of Turkish brands and products in the UK market. Available supplies in the native economy was also important. For example, good and economic supply of lamb meat in the UK has been an advantage for doner kebab as this meat is critical for lamb doner. Other international mobility processes, such as growing tourism between the two countries helped familiarity grow among British consumers. Perhaps indirectly, success and spread of doner kebab in Germany and other European countries also contributed to the rapid spread of doner kebab in Britain.

The growth of doner kebab appeal also means that there is likely to be more demand for halal products (Shoemaker, 2006), particularly meat as kebabs are mostly using halal supplies.⁶ On the other hand, wider appeal of doner kebab means ethnic businesses moving into the mainstream. This may be good news

⁶ See also Wilson and Liu (2010) and Alserhan (2010).

for many concerned as a positive sign for further integration. Another possibility is that some big fast food chains may join the race and benefit from this existing ethnic skills pool and expanding market of a clearly differentiated and increasingly popular product.

Doner Kebab is apparently and clearly a food originating from Turkey and most likely it is transferred to the UK by the diaspora from Turkey. Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001:27) suggest that country of origin is what consumers associate a product with and not necessarily the country where it is produced. One other question then comes to mind: Will it ever be stripped off of the country of origin and if so, how it will happen? This is something time will tell.

This paper aimed at outlining the development of doner kebab in British fast food market with reference to the impact of international human mobility and relevant processes. There are already clues for developing a conceptual model for development of markets using the constructs of transnational market entry (diaspora market entry), nostalgia marketing, ethnic marketing, and transnational mobile consumers. Nevertheless, what have been discussed drawing on some indirect data and preliminary thoughts in this paper is just a beginning of a much wider debate. We invite more critical readings and empirical studies to further iterate this conceptual line of investigation.

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